

# Baptism--Infant Baptism



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Baptism-- infant baptism



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# Baptism—Infant Baptism

BY

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Translated from the Norwegian



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## I



HERE are perhaps few features of the Christian faith which in our day cause so many struggles and difficulties as Baptism.

Now, these difficulties are by no means new. In the history of the Church these questions are of long standing: Is Baptism a means of grace or only an emblem?—is it a means of regeneration or is it only an act of admission into the Christian congregation?

If Baptism is a means of regeneration, what is the relation between Baptism and the Word?

When are we to be baptized? As children, or as adults?

If Baptism regenerates and we are baptized as children, what is the relation between regeneration thru Baptism and conversion?

Does one who was baptized as a child need conversion whether he falls from his baptismal covenant or not?

As stated above, these questions are old. But in recent times something new has been added which makes the matter more difficult and dan-

gerous than before. There are now many who have been vacillating back and forth between infant Baptism and adult Baptism. Now they are convinced that one is right, now that the other is right. They are simply unable to arrive at any definite decision. They get weary. And they cut the Gordian knot at ease by saying: both are right, or: neither is right. Infant Baptism or adult Baptism—choose either of them, just as you see fit! It is immaterial. God's Word on this point is so obscure that no one can say that he is right and that the others are mistaken.

There are, it seems to me, particularly two aspects of this modern attitude to the question of Baptism that are very dangerous.

In the first place, it is the *doubt* or *unbelief* expressed with regard to the Word of God. The Word says that the way of salvation is so plain that not even the *fool* shall err (Is. 35:8). And Jesus says that it is revealed unto *babes* (Matt. 11:25). And yet it is claimed in our day that God has expressed Himself so obscurely that He cannot ask of His simple-minded children to be able to understand clearly what He has meant.

Well, but the question is not so important, they tell us. It is not a matter of salvation on the one hand or perdition on the other.

To this it must be said that it is no *theoretical* question, but an eminently *practical* and *act-*



*ual* one in every family. Is it the intention of Jesus that I shall baptize my children, or is it not?

Moreover, who among us dare say that anything is unimportant which God has revealed to us in His Word? When God has taken the trouble to speak out about a matter in His Word He expects of me that I consider it so important that I must make sure what His meaning and intention are.

In the second place, this vague attitude with regard to the question of Baptism will necessarily lead to a defect in the *preaching* of the Word. In order not to offend those in the audience who hold a different view of Baptism, the preacher is compelled to be silent on the subject of Baptism. In the long run this attitude will become intolerable. He must stand up and say as Paul did: "I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

I do not say this to offend or injure my friends and brothers who are agitating in favor of such an alliance. I say it because I see that this view is making headway even in our inner mission work. And as I am convinced that infidelity to the Word of God will injure both ourselves and the unity of believers, I cannot remain silent. It is the *Word* that must create unity among us. *We* must not establish any arti-

ficial unity by cutting away from the Word whatever would separate us.

For this reason we must be on our guard in our inner mission against an alliance which would have to be bought at the price of suppressing the counsel of God regarding Baptism. That would be an artificial, manufactured unity and not according to the Word of God—no matter how well-meaning and sincere its advocates may be.

These different views of the Word of God cannot be avoided so long as the Church of God remains in this imperfect world. But these differences do not abolish the real unity of the children of God. We have the same Savior, the same life in God, the same love, the same hope.

These differences become injurious only when childish zeal makes the Christians eager to *overlook* the differences and to make out a unity as tho these differences did not exist. In that case they become injurious, this alliance compelling the individual believer to suppress his conviction with regard to God's plan of salvation. And it soon leads the individual to a loss of all personal convictions. The Word of God is not permitted to carry a definite conviction. And then—well, we are told that the matter is obscure; that it is not a matter of salvation or perdition. In this way human opinion is put above the Word of God.

If I wish to get at the *right*, the *true* understanding of the Word of God, *I must be obedient to the Word*. This, again, means that I must be obedient to the light on the Word which I possess now. If my understanding of the Word is *correct* it will enable me, by following it in obedient action, to have it established and confirmed so that I shall not be carried away by every wind of doctrine. If my view of the Word is *at fault*, by following the light that I have I shall be able to see my error. And if I yield to the new light and admit that I was mistaken, I shall pass on from light to light in the Word of God.

The main cause of the great vagueness with regard to the question of Baptism—as well as in many other questions of faith—is simply the failure *to embrace the entire counsel of God*. People do not consider *all* the references to Baptism found in Scripture, and thus there is no chance to make out a *combined* testimony of God's counsel with regard to Baptism. Certain expressions in which the individual is particularly interested are picked out, and the result as a whole is misleading.

My aim in presenting the following is to set forth everything that Scripture says about Baptism, and to point to the view which may harmonize with all these expressions without doing violence to the ordinary meaning of the words.

And so I challenge every one of my readers to make a personal test of it according to the Word, so as to be convinced whether it agrees with the Word or not.

## II

In the first place, let me point to what all Christian denominations agree on with regard to Baptism. All denominations believing in Jesus Christ as He is proclaimed to us in the New Testament writings are agreed on the following points with regard to Baptism:

1. Baptism is an act which is ordained by Jesus Himself.

2. It is an act which He has instructed His Church to perform (Matt. 28:19).

3. It is an act which, according to the command of Jesus, shall accompany the adoption of the individual into the fellowship of God: make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

4. At the same time it is the act by which the individual is admitted into the congregation (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47).

5. This act was enjoined by Jesus as a *symbolic*, that is, *figurative* act. That we are wholly submerged in the water and then rise and walk out of the water is a visible expression of what

takes place at that moment in the unseen, spiritual world: that the old man is drowned and the new man rises in us. We are baptized with Christ into death; but are also raised with Him from the grave (Rom. 6:3-6).

But is Baptism anything more than such a symbolic act? Did Jesus mean something more by it when He prescribed it for His Church? Here the opinions begin to differ, and there are two general views: Does Jesus give, in and by this act, any invisible grace to the one baptized, or is it merely a sacred ceremony symbolizing what takes place in the world of the heart?

Turning to Scripture, we are in the first place led to examine into the relation between the baptism of John the Baptist and the one which Jesus instituted and committed to the disciples after his resurrection. This is the more natural, because Jesus Himself, at the beginning of His mission, made use of the baptism of John (John 3:22 and 4:1-2). Now we see that both the baptism of John and the Christian Baptism lead to the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38). And yet there must be a difference between them. This can be seen most clearly from the fact that Jesus found it necessary to institute *another* Baptism after His resurrection than the one He had used before.

We also see it clearly from the steps taken



by Paul in Ephesus, where he met some who had been baptized only with the baptism of John. He immediately instructed them to be baptized into the name of Jesus (Acts 19:1-5). And when John himself wished to point to the difference between his own baptism and the Baptism of the Messiah he said: I baptize *in water* (Matt. 3:11). John knew that the baptism which God had assigned to him was not the final one, but belonged to everything else in the Old Covenant, which was only "a shadow of the things to come, but the body is Christ's" (Col. 2:17). The shadow which the body throws ahead of itself. The baptism of John only paved the way for the Messianic salvation. Only the Messianic Baptism makes one a partaker of this salvation. This must be what John wishes to say when he answers: "I baptize in water. But He (Messiah) shall *baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

And when Jesus says (John 3:5) that except one be *born of water and the Spirit* he cannot enter the Kingdom of God, He must intend to remind Nicodemus of the words of John the Baptist. The baptism of the latter in water to conversion was not enough. Only Messiah's Baptism in the Holy Spirit gives the new life and admission into the Kingdom of God.

These very words by John and by Jesus Himself seem to point out definitely that the

*Christian Baptism gives that which John's baptism only pointed to and was a symbol of. Now the crucial question for us is: How did the apostles understand the Baptism instituted by Jesus after His resurrection?*

They must have looked upon it as something more than an initiation ceremony, something more than a symbolic rite. Peter, for instance, speaks of *the water that saves us in Baptism* (1 Pet. 3:21). Unless we do violence to the plain words and the train of thought in this quotation from Peter we must abide by his expression: The water of Baptism saves us. As the eight souls at the time of Noah experienced God's saving power in the floods that separated them from the perverse generation, in the same manner we now find the saving power of God in the water of Baptism. In other words, God has joined His salvation to the water of Baptism.

In Paul's epistle to Titus (3:5) we find exactly the same thought: "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy *He saved us, thru the washing of regeneration.*" That the expression, "washing of regeneration," in this case means Baptism, should never have been doubted. Nor would there ever have been any doubt on this point if there had not been a definite *wish* to

get away from such a definition of Baptism. The congregation which Paul lived in and spoke to possessed only one washing, namely Baptism. Accordingly, when he speaks of *the washing*, it was quite clear to all his readers that he meant Baptism. And here he says plainly that it is a *means* by which we are saved.

How Baptism imparts to the individual sinner the salvation achieved by Jesus, is explained more fully in Gal. 3:27. Here Paul says that by Baptism we are brought into union with Christ: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

Now we know that Christ was made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, if we thru Baptism are made partakers of Christ, we are also partakers of *the whole salvation* with forgiveness of sins, regeneration, sanctification, and redemption.

This is stated in greater detail in the passages that we now shall mention: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Here the words state plainly that Baptism is an act leading to the remission of sins.

Still more clearly is this brought out in the words of Ananias to Paul: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and *wash away thy sins*" (Acts 22:16). This feature of

the effect of Baptism we also find expressed in 1 Peter 3:21, where it is said that Baptism is the appeal of a good conscience toward God, and in Heb. 10:22: "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water"; or Eph. 5:26, where Paul says of the Church that Christ sanctified it, "having cleansed it by the washing of water with the Word."

Even here it has been denied that the apostle speaks of Baptism. It is supposed that the washing of water is a figurative expression of the inner spiritual purification accomplished by the Word of God. But we have no right to take such an expression as a metaphor until it appears that the *plain, ordinary* meaning is impossible. This is an old and generally acknowledged rule of interpretation. And here we find that the plain, ordinary meaning not only makes good sense, the Church having only one washing of water done in and with the Word, namely, Baptism; but this interpretation also gives a meaning which agrees thoroly with the Biblical references to Baptism, as I have pointed out in the foregoing.

The union which is established thru Baptism between Christ and the person baptized is further described as a union with the death of Christ (Col. 2:12): "Having been buried with

Him in *Baptism*." Rom. 6:3 ff.: "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him thru Baptism into death. . . . If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death. . . . Knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him."—These passages therefore tell us that the crucifixion and dooming to death of the old man are founded on the mysterious union established by Baptism between us and Christ and His death.

At the same time we are here told that the new life which we now live in Christ with God is based on the union with Christ and His resurrection which is established by Baptism (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:48).

If it is in and by Baptism that we receive the new life, then Baptism regenerates. And this is stated expressly by Paul in Tit. 3:5: "He saved us thru the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Here it is also said that regeneration takes place by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus said to Nicodemus that he must "be born of water and the Spirit." From this it follows that we also receive the Spirit in Baptism. This is stated directly in Acts 2:38: "And be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."



Likewise Paul says, 1 Cor. 12:13: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body."

Returning to the words of Jesus at the institution, we see the profound harmony between the words of institution and the apostolic preaching about Baptism.

Jesus says: "Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." To "make disciples of," of course means to make disciples of Christ, of the Messiah. But to make one a disciple of the Messiah means to make him a partaker of all the benefits of salvation which Messiah brings.

The same thing is embodied in the expression: "baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." They shall be baptized to or *into* the sum of the divine salvation as it is found in the Father and the Son and the Spirit. In the foregoing we have found that the apostles enumerate as the fruit and gift of Baptism: remission of sins, the giving of the Spirit, regeneration to a new life, and incorporation into the body of Christ. We thus see that they have done nothing except specifying the benefits of salvation which, according to the institutional words of Jesus, Baptism is intended to confer upon the one who is baptized.

Now I have examined into all the Biblical

references to Baptism and have tried to find the inner harmony among them. Only a few remarks about the gift of the Spirit now remain. But these seem fraught with serious difficulties. We have seen that the giving of the Spirit is attached to Baptism (Tit. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:38). But there are two passages in Scripture which apparently state that the giving of the Spirit takes place independently of Baptism. In Acts 8:16 we are told about the believers in Samaria that the Spirit was not yet fallen upon them. Only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And Acts 10:44 tells us that the Spirit fell on all those that heard the Word at the house of Cornelius. But so far none of them had been baptized (v. 47).

Meanwhile this difficulty is solved in our minds when we observe that the expression "the Holy Spirit" has two somewhat different meanings when Scripture employs it about receiving or being filled with the Spirit. Sometimes it refers to the person of the Spirit, as the one who creates or brings forth the new life. In this sense it is used by Jesus in John 3:5: "born of water and the Spirit." Similarly by Paul: "baptized in one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13); and: "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5).

But at the same time the expression, "the

Holy Spirit," is used to indicate the extraordinary, external, visible, and tangible spiritual gifts, such as the gifts of tongues, of prophecy, of healing, etc. For example, Acts 2:4 and 11:15. And there can be no reasonable doubt but that this is the meaning of the expression in the two quotations made above (Acts 8:10 and 10:44). Indeed it is said (8:18) that "Simon *saw* that thru the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given." He could of course see only the eternal gifts of the Spirit. And 10:46 says directly that the gifts are meant: "They of the circumcision were amazed because that on the gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 45), "for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (v. 46).

Thus we see from the Acts that the conferring of these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit was *not* attached to Baptism. We all know that at Pentecost the apostles themselves received those gifts without any baptismal act. And we see from 19:6 that the giving of these spiritual gifts took place after Baptism and was accompanied by imposition of hands. First, Paul baptized these disciples of John with the Christian Baptism. Next he laid his hands on them, and then they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. The same practice we find in 8:

13-17. The believers in Samaria were baptized. Then the apostles came and laid their hands on them. And so they received the gifts of the Spirit. From Heb. 6:2, 1 Tim. 4:14, and 2 Tim. 1:6 we see that this practice has become general in the churches. The *gifts* of the Spirit are granted *after* Baptism by the laying on of hands.

Hence, we arrive at this result: The gift of the Spirit which we receive in Baptism is that which regenerates us to a new life. The gift of the Spirit which was given after Baptism by the laying on of hands contains the extraordinary gifts of grace. These do not affect the personal salvation, the personal relation to God so much as they affect the outward relation to believers and to the unsaved. They affect, to a greater extent, the equipment for *work*. And these gifts are *varied* (1 Cor. 12:28-30): "Are all apostles? Have all gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues?"

### III

We have now seen how Jesus has instituted Baptism as the external act by which He makes the individual sinner a partaker of the completed salvation by the remission of sins and a new birth. Now, our next question will be: Are all those that have been baptized to be regarded

as born again? Does Baptism work regeneration in all those that are baptized?

As an answer to this question, Gal. 3:27 has been quoted: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." Those who use this argument hold that Baptism has this saving effect *simply by being administered*, no matter where it takes place. But the connection of the quotation with what precedes and follows emphatically prohibits us from taking the words of Paul in that external sense. For in verse 26 he says: "For ye are all sons of God, *thru faith*, in Christ Jesus." When he continues in verse 27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ," every one must of course understand that he puts the saving efficacy of Baptism in connection with faith. Because he first mentioned their faith, therefore he can say that they all put on Christ when they were baptized.

We find the same thought in Peter's speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:38): "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you." And all thru the history of the apostles we see that Baptism was administered only where the Word had been received in repentance and faith (8:12, 13, 37; 9:18; 11:17; 16:30-33). Repentance and faith, therefore, are the two conditions which must be



found in the one baptized if Baptism is to work salvation in him. If an unconverted and unbelieving person is baptized, even such a person is met in the water of Baptism by the regenerating and saving grace of God; in him, however, it can not work *salvation*, but the reverse, namely, *judgment*, in the same manner as he who goes unworthy to the Lord's Supper also receives the body and blood of Jesus; but he does not receive it unto salvation; "he eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself" (1 Cor. 11:29).

If Baptism presupposes repentance and faith in the one who is to be baptized, then it is plain that Baptism as a means of grace will effect salvation only *in union with the means of grace of the Word*. We also find this clearly stated in the institutional words of Jesus: *baptizing them and teaching them*. And the Word and Baptism have worked hand in hand in the Church of the Lord from the very beginning. Repentance and faith are effected in the heart of the sinner by the Gospel of Christ (Luke 24:47): Preach repentance in the name of Jesus. And Rom. 10:17: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." And only when the Word has caused a change of mind in the sinner, so that he sees that in himself he is dead and lost, and, *believing the Word*, turns

to his Savior, as He meets him with His saving and regenerating grace in Baptism—then only can Baptism be unto him salvation.

## IV

Therefore, as we have seen, regeneration is connected with Baptism. But now we find Scripture passages to the effect that regeneration is caused by the *Word* (1 Pet. 1:23): "Having been begotten again thru the *Word of God*"; (James 1:18): "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth"; (1 Cor. 4:15): "For in Christ Jesus I begat you thru the *Gospel*."

Have we then two means of regeneration? And what is the relation between them? Are we to be regenerated thru both? Or may we choose either one as we please?

These questions have caused much confusion. And it may be that most of those who have doubts about Baptism really got their start at this point. They have reasoned in this manner: "It is stated plainly that we are regenerated thru the *Word*. Therefore it must be a mistake to believe that we are regenerated thru *Baptism*." No, it is no mistake. If we consider "*the whole counsel of God*," cutting away no part of God's Word to suit ourselves, we must

abide by this: In Scripture it is said that regeneration is wrought both thru the Word and thru Baptism. And when Scripture says so, we abide by it, even tho it worries our reason.

Here we have a striking illustration of our aptness to hatch out difficulties by our interpretation of Scripture, by a soulless bondage under the letter of the Bible. When James, Peter, and Paul say: You are regenerated thru *the Word*, we read this as tho the following words were added: *and not thru Baptism*. Thus, and only thus, do we get into trouble. To the apostles, on the other hand, this relation between Baptism and the Word presented no difficulty. To be regenerated thru the Word and to be regenerated thru Baptism was one and the same thing to them, tho expressed in different ways, looked at from different points of view. And we must accustom ourselves to the practice of the apostles to state that side of the question which is of interest in that connection, without mentioning the other sides of the question, which they have discussed elsewhere.

I shall take one instance. Paul says (Gal. 3:26): "Ye are all sons of God, *thru faith*." Now, if we were to stress this expression—as his expression, "regenerated *thru the Word*," has been stressed—we should come to the con-

clusion that neither Baptism nor the Word is necessary in order to become a child of God. For here he says only: thru faith. Any one can see that this sort of interpretation is reprehensible. We must include everything said by Paul on this subject. And then we shall find that he bases our sonship both on the Word and on Baptism. But here he speaks of *this* point of the question, that on *our* part our sonship depends on faith.

In the same manner exactly the apostles state that we are regenerated thru the Word, at other places that we are regenerated thru Baptism. The one does not exclude the other. The one completes and throws light on the other.

To the apostles it is self-evident that the Word and Baptism work *together*. Belief cometh by the Word (Rom. 10:17).

But belief is based on nothing hazy. Belief is belief in the Gospel (Mark 1:15): "Repent ye, and believe in the Gospel." But the Gospel also contains the words of Jesus about Baptism. Therefore, no one can come to a belief in the Gospel without immediately seeking Baptism (Acts 2:41): "They, then, that received His Word were baptized." The wish to be baptized, therefore, is the first evidence that the Gospel has produced faith.

From what has been said above it may be seen that Baptism and the Word in the New Testament are not mutually antagonistic, but are most intimately connected with each other. Baptism is a part of the Gospel. Baptism is a part of the Glad Tidings. Therefore the apostles can speak of our regeneration thru the Gospel or the Word in places where the connection does not suggest any interest in picking out and emphasizing particular expedients made use of by the Gospel of Christ.

On the other hand we see that in places where, as a result of the connection, the apostles wish to express themselves about the peculiar nature and effect of Baptism, they state that Christ has attached the saving and regenerating work of the Spirit to the washing of Baptism. See the above Bible passages referring to Baptism.

To this, however, the following objection has been made: Now that the Word is the means of grace working repentance and belief—as we have just seen—what else is there to be done? Does there remain anything for Christ to do with the sinner in Baptism? If the Word has wrought faith in the heart, the sinner is obviously *justified*, for we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). And if we are justified we are



also the children of God, as Paul says (Gal. 3:26): "Ye are all sons of God thru faith." But if a sinner has become a child of God, is he not at the same time regenerated?

This matter seems the more difficult inasmuch as Scripture not only attaches regeneration but also justification, that is to say, remission of sins, to Baptism. Look at the above quotations from Holy Writ: Acts 22:16; 2:38; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22. How is *this* to be understood, that Scripture expressly states that faith cometh by the *Word* (Rom. 10:17), and by faith we are justified?

Here, too, we invent a difficulty unknown to the apostles. The fact that we are justified by faith and that faith comes by the *Word*, does not prevent justification from being accomplished of God at the moment when the sinner in faith seeks and receives Baptism. When the apostles state that the remission of sins is connected with Baptism they wish to emphasize this feature of divine salvation that the remission of sins is attached to an external act, namely, Baptism in water. When they speak of our being justified by faith they wish to emphasize this feature of God's salvation, that grace can have no saving effect in us unless it can work in us that acceptivity for which Scripture employs the term *faith*.

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Baptism, therefore, is the *objective* act of God, by which, without depending on us, it meets us with its saving grace. But our salvation by this act of grace from God is conditioned on a *subjective* receptivity in us, which is faith.

## V

In treating of the relation between the two means of grace—the Word and Baptism—we must also investigate the sadly frequent case of the baptized person losing his new life in God. From Scripture we now see that in the case of one who has fallen in this manner, the *Word* is to be used as a means of grace for his awakening, repentance, and belief. Now, a good deal might be said in favor of baptizing such a person over again.

Regarding this matter, we have not a word in Scripture, either for or against it. We have only the apostolic practice. The apostles never re-baptized the fallen ones when these afterwards were awakened and converted. Therefore they looked upon Baptism as a divine act which did not need to be repeated even if the life given in Baptism had died out. And to this apostolic practice the Christian Church is obedient, even tho it is unable to explain why it must be so.

Shall one who has fallen but has been awak-

ened thru the Word, *repent unto Baptism*? This is a question often discussed, especially by the past generation. Most people answered: No, he shall repent *unto Christ*.

To array these as opposites over against each other is but another instance of devising difficulties where there are none. To be converted always means to be converted to Christ. But the question is, in what *means* of salvation and *means* of grace Christ wishes to meet the one who has been awakened. Shall the awakened backslider lay hold on the *Word* of Christ alone, or shall he also lay hold on the *act* which Christ performed on him in Baptism? Upon the whole, our lay preachers have pointed out the *Word* as the means by which Christ saves the baptized backslider when he again is awakened from his sin. And in this manner the lay preachers have desired to take a positive stand against those clergymen who direct the seeking soul to Baptism.

What has been feared, however, in this practice on the part of the clergy is not their pointing to Baptism, but it is the *weakening of the demand for repentance* which has often followed the emphasis on Baptism. What has been feared is the thought of the "germ of Baptism" supposed to remain in all those who have been bap-

tized, even tho they went astray from God. This thought has been feared because it led to the supposition that the fallen one did not need repentance. The slumbering life of regeneration still remaining in the backslider only needed to be developed and to attain greater power in him. Repentance, the transition from death to life, is lost sight of.

And such a view as this is opposed to Scripture. The entire preaching and practice of the apostles show that the one who has fallen must *repent* in order to be saved again (Eph. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:25). And because he is dead he must receive life again (1 John 5:16), that is, be *born* again.

But still the question remains: Shall the repentant backslider cling to the *Word* of Christ alone, or also to the *act* of Christ with him in Baptism?

We have seen in the foregoing that the Word, which works repentance and faith, directs one who is not baptized to Baptism as the means Christ Himself has chosen to make the sinner a partaker of salvation. The baptized backslider is directed by the Word the same way—to Baptism. But not in such a manner that Baptism is to be repeated. The apostles did not rebaptize backsliders. When the Word, nevertheless,

points to Baptism, it means that *Baptism has a permanent* significance; not in the above mentioned *subjective* sense that there remains a latent life of regeneration in the heart of the backslider; but in the *objective* sense that the gift and grace of salvation of Christ in Baptism has not been withdrawn by God, even tho I have rejected this gift. The power of Baptism to regenerate is unimpaired, the same as at the moment of Baptism. The only question is whether the backslider can receive its regenerating power. Therefore the backslider is again regenerated as soon as the Word has worked repentance and faith in him. This phase of Baptism is expressed in 1 Peter 3:21 by the thought that Baptism is a covenant with God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This covenant remains unbroken from God's side, even tho it be broken by us.

But if Baptism is such a covenant of grace from God's side, then it seems quite clear that the apostate at his conversion must turn back to the covenant which he indeed has broken but which God still stands by and which God invites him to enter into once again. This Biblical application of Baptism in the guidance of people seeking salvation has great advantages over the preaching that never dares mention Baptism.

## VI

Now we turn to *Infant Baptism*.

## 1

This is unquestionably the first difficult point in the question of Baptism. To many people Infant Baptism seems equally unreasonable whether Baptism is considered as a means of regeneration or merely as a rite of initiation when a person is to join the Church. For properly speaking the child does not join the Church, it does not become a full-fledged member of the Church before attaining to the age when he or she, by a free, personal choice, wishes to profess the faith of the Church and join the congregation. But then it is supposed to be natural that Baptism, the act of admission into the congregation, is performed at the moment of admission, that is, upon the grown person, and not upon the child.

Still more unreasonable it seems to many to apply Baptism to infants if it is a means of a new birth. We have seen in the foregoing that Baptism has no saving power except in the person receiving it with repentance and faith. But can any one imagine that repentance and faith are to be found in an infant? And if these are not found, then Baptism has no saving effect.



But then it is not only useless to baptize children, it is even wrong.

And what does Scripture say? Not a word does it say *directly* to the effect that children shall be baptized. Nor is there a single word quite definitely stating that children were baptized. It is true that reference has been made to the account of the Baptism performed at the house of Cornelius, where it is stated that the whole family were baptized (Acts 10:44,48). Similarly, it is said of the jailor at Philippi that *he and all his* were baptized (Acts 16:33). And Paul tells us that he has baptized *the household of Stephanas* (1 Cor. 1:16). But were there little children in those families? Nothing is said on that point.

It is also supposed that Scripture contains expressions showing that the baptizing of *children* was unknown to the apostles, as in 1 Cor. 7:14. Here the apostle says that the believing spouse does not need to part with his or her unbelieving mate, provided the latter agrees to remain in wedlock. For, he says, the unbelieving husband is "sanctified" in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is "sanctified" in the husband. And when the apostle adds: "Else were your children unclean," it is supposed that the apostle could never have uttered these words if Infant

Baptism had been practiced. In that case he would have referred to the fact that they had been baptized.

This, however, rests on a misunderstanding of the context. Paul here speaks of children one of whose parents was a heathen. And he puts their children on the side of the heathen parent. This shows that he refers to children that have not been baptized, that is to say, children who by their heathen father or heathen mother were prevented from following the believing parent.

And now he states that the parent who has not been baptized as well as the child that has not been baptized are "sanctified" by the believing parent. That in this connection he does not mean sanctification in the ordinary Biblical sense, that is, the sanctification needed for a life in fellowship *with God*, is made quite evident from the fact that the heathen parent cannot be sanctified *in this sense* by the influence emanating from a believing person. In order to get *this* sanctification the heathen husband or wife must be baptized (Eph. 5:26), after having attained to repentance and faith by personal experience.

Therefore the apostle here speaks of sanctification in a somewhat different sense: sanctifica-

tion or consecration not for fellowship *with God*, but for a special fellowship with *human beings*, now clearly defined for the close family relations between husband and wife or between parents and children. And he sees that so long as the children or the heathen mate have not been personally sanctified (by Baptism) for fellowship with God they are, nevertheless, sanctified by the believing spouse for living together in the family. The believing husband or wife does not need to be afraid of becoming unclean by this relation.

Consequently the words of the apostle in this place can be used neither for nor against Infant Baptism.

Now, if we turn to the earliest history of the Church we find that this, too, seems to confirm the theory that the apostles surely did not baptize children. For we see that not until about the year 250 A. D. was Infant Baptism introduced thruout the entire Christian Church. Before this date Infant Baptism was practiced in some parts of the Church, Adult Baptism in others. Does not this indicate that the apostles did not know of it or practice it? For if the apostles had practiced Infant Baptism, how could certain portions of the Church depart from this apostolic practice and baptize only grown people?

This has led to the following reasoning: If the apostles neither knew of nor practiced Infant Baptism, then the Lord neither desired nor instituted Baptism for children. Consequently, it is no baptism, but merely a human ordinance having no divine power or effect.

Hence we find that those who reject Infant Baptism and get baptized as adults assert that they are simply *baptized*, not rebaptized. And according to their opinion, we, who were baptized as children, have not been baptized at all.

In the foregoing I have referred to the most important arguments against Infant Baptism, and now I propose to discuss them.

In the first place I wish to point to the very *starting point*: the contention that Infant Baptism was not instituted by our Lord, and therefore is no baptism, but a human invention. This starting point is erroneous, inasmuch as our Lord never instituted either Infant or Adult Baptism. He instituted *Baptism*. Once and for all time He has defined what Baptism is and what it does. But when and where it is to be administered He has not mentioned by a single word. This he left to His apostles to decide. Just as with the Eucharist. Christ instituted it and gave it the character and power it was to have for all time. But He said not a word about

when and where the elements were to be distributed. This He left to His disciples to decide.

Further: Now that the opponents of Infant Baptism stubbornly protest that it is not stated in Scripture that we shall baptize children or that children were baptized, we naturally have a right to expect them to assume a similar attitude to Scripture also in other matters. Now, it is well known that nowhere in Scripture are women commanded to take part in the Communion. Nor is it said anywhere that the apostles administered the Lord's Supper to women. But so far I have never heard any one using this as an argument preventing women from partaking of the body and blood of Christ. No one will assume so pedantic and unspiritual an attitude towards Scripture. But by what right can any one ask more of Scripture on the question of Baptism than on the question of the Lord's Supper?

No; this silence of Scripture on Infant Baptism means no more than the silence of Scripture on the question of women celebrating the Lord's Supper. The apostles *may* have practiced Infant Baptism.

But does not, nevertheless, the history of Baptism during the period following the death of the apostles show that they did *not* baptize children? No, it does not. The earliest history of Baptism is not so easy to explain as the opponents of Infant Baptism seem to think. The fact is, that Infant Baptism did not become general in the *whole* Church until about the year 250 A. D. Before that time we find two different views. In certain parts of the Church Infant Baptism was practiced, in other parts only Adult Baptism.

Now, both of these views cannot be right. One of them must have departed from the practice of the apostles.

Thus the question will be: Did the apostles baptize only grown people? Was then the practice of baptizing children started after the times of the apostles? Or, did the apostles baptize both grown people and children? In that case it is the post-apostolic age that arbitrarily neglected to baptize children.

In order to answer this question we must observe two things:

1. Those church fathers who defend Infant Baptism maintain that it was practiced by the apostles. And this is not denied by the Church



fathers who oppose Infant Baptism. When they argue against baptizing children they do not appeal to the apostolic practice, but to purely intellectual reasoning. "Why is the innocent age taken to Baptism?" says Tertullian.

2. It is a matter of general knowledge that at a very early date in the ancient Church a view of Baptism gained ground which made it customary to postpone Baptism;—indeed it was often postponed until a person lay on his death-bed. For it was supposed that Baptism worked the remission only of sins that were committed before Baptism. But then we find no difficulty in explaining why the parents would not baptize their children. In this manner we find an explanation of the otherwise remarkable fact that immediately after the death of the apostles there was a departure from the practice with regard to Baptism which had been handed down by the apostles.

## 3

We now return to the institution of Baptism by Jesus. He said: Go and make disciples of *all*, baptizing and teaching them.

Here we must observe in the *first* place that Jesus Himself has established the manner, the means by which people may become His disciples: *Baptism and the Word*. In the *second*

place we must observe that this is the general condition on which a person may become His disciple. He who does not become a disciple thru Baptism and the Word does not become a disciple at all. Since Baptism was instituted and the preaching of the Gospel was begun, since these words by Jesus were spoken, this is the way.

*From this it plainly follows that even children must follow this way if they, indeed as children, can become disciples of Jesus. Make disciples of all, baptizing and teaching them, Jesus said. When He issued this short, clear order He assumed that the apostles themselves were to decide whom they should baptize and how soon they might baptize a person. Not even in the case of grown people did Jesus give any rules in this matter. The disciples themselves should in each individual case decide whether Baptism was to be administered or not. And if Baptism could not be applied, the person in question could not become a disciple of Jesus.*

*It is implied in the plain command of Jesus that Baptism shall be applied to all who possess the general qualifications for receiving the grace given by Jesus thru Baptism.*

Among these "all" are also the children. But

as the disciples must decide whether the adult candidates for Baptism can receive the gifts of Baptism, in the same manner they must also decide whether the children can receive those gifts.

Hence: Is a child capable of receiving the gift of Baptism?

## 4

Before proceeding to answer this question we must inquire into a question which to many is still more difficult: *Do children need the gift of Baptism?* In the preceding pages we found from Scripture that the gift of Baptism consists of 1) remission of sins; 2) the giving of the Spirit; 3) regeneration; and 4) incorporation in the body of Jesus, which is the Church.

Now, then: Do children need to be baptized? That is, do children need remission of sins and regeneration?

Here we touch the question which for most objectors is the real reason why they began to doubt with regard to Infant Baptism. Evidently such a little child has committed no sin! And how innocent they are, these little ones! Besides, Jesus says that *to such belongeth the Kingdom of Heaven* (Mark 10:15).

But this expression by Jesus cannot be taken in this sense. He does *not* say that the children

belong inside the Kingdom of God, but that the Kingdom of God belongs to them, that is to say, is intended for them. The disciples doubted that the Kingdom of God was intended for the children. Therefore they wanted to keep them away, so that Jesus should not be hampered in His great work by little children. But then Jesus indignantly said: Let the little children come to me; the Kingdom of God is intended for them.

That this interpretation of the words of Jesus is correct we may corroborate by His words to Nicodemus: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh* (John 3:6). It does not help, no matter how *innocent* the little ones look. They are, nevertheless, born of the flesh, and therefore, as members of the accursed race, they are subject to the wrath and judgment of God, as Paul puts it (Eph. 2:3): "We are *by nature* children of wrath."

From this it may be seen quite clearly that children, according to their natural birth, cannot belong in the Kingdom of God. They must be born again of water and the Spirit, Jesus says to Nicodemus, for otherwise no one can enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5).

Now the objection is made that Jesus did not baptize the little children that are mentioned in Mark 10. On the contrary, He took them in

His arms, laying His hands upon them, and blessed them (verse 16). Therefore, it is said, we should do the same thing with our little ones. Then we act on a Scriptural basis—in fact, we do exactly as Jesus did.

To this it may be said: It is true that Jesus did not baptize the little ones. But neither did He baptize grown people. He baptized no one. And that for the simple reason that He did not institute His Baptism until the moment when He had finished His mission on earth and ascended into Heaven (Matt. 28:19). But at that moment He gave Baptism to His friends and said: Make disciples of *all*, baptizing and teaching them. He never gave us any command to take the little ones in our arms and bless them. But He has expressly commanded us: Make disciples of *all*, baptizing and teaching them.

We have now seen that children *need* Baptism on account of the sinful heritage which they carry with them from their natural birth.

## 5

Now we turn to the next question: *Are children susceptible of the gift of Baptism?* For it is not ascertained whether children shall be baptized even if they need Baptism. There is a multitude of grown people that one cannot bap-

tize even tho they need Baptism. It is well known that we do not baptize the heathen until they are receptive of the blessing of Baptism.

In the preceding we have seen that the saving effect of Baptism is conditioned on *repentance and faith* of the one who is baptized. But repentance in a child is out of the question. It is understood that a child cannot even think. Thus it seems to be settled that Baptism must be postponed until the child, in personal repentance and faith, asks for Baptism.

No matter how correct this view may seem, it cannot be harmonized with the words of Jesus Himself: Suffer the little children to come unto me (Luke 18:16). The original text has (Luke 18:15) *babies*. Jesus therefore desires that the children shall be brought to Him even before they themselves are able to decide in the matter. It is also said that they were *brought* to Jesus. He wants to have them in His Kingdom, have them as His disciples. He even became indignant when His disciples tried to prevent the children from becoming partakers of the Kingdom. But *to make disciples* is possible only in one way: by *baptizing and teaching*. This is the only command Jesus has given on this matter. If we are to bring them to Jesus *now*, after the issue of His last order, we have nothing else to do than to baptize and teach them.



But they cannot repent and believe, as we grown people can?

How difficult it is for us to understand the plain words of Jesus! *We demand that the children shall become as we grown people are, then they, too, shall be permitted to enter into the Kingdom of God. And yet Jesus has expressly said that we must become like children if we are to enter at all.* "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3). "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein" (Mark 10:15).

## 6

Those who demand repentance and faith from the child as the necessary condition for being baptized betray a false and defective view of both sin and grace.

That a grown person needs repentance and faith in order to receive the gift of Baptism—life in God—has been looked upon *partly* as a way of making a person worthy of salvation; *partly* as the active coöperation of a person in his own salvation by attracting the forces of grace to himself. Repentance is looked upon mainly as the sinner's determination to quit sinning and to embrace Christ in faith. Only after

this resolution has been made, has Christ a chance to forgive the sinner his sins.

According to this view of repentance and faith it is evident that no infant is qualified for salvation by the grace of Baptism; for an infant is not able to turn from its sinful nature and in faith embrace and appropriate the gifts of Christ.

But such a view of repentance and faith does not agree with the view of Scripture with regard to the sinful perversity of man, his total inability to assist in saving himself. Repentance does not mean that a man by his own will quits sinning and begins to love God. No, the mind of the flesh is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). Repentance, or the change of mind, consists, on the contrary, in this, that man sees and admits his enmity against God, his love for sin, and his inability to quit his life in sin and to begin a new life. *Repentance*, therefore, means the change of mind taking place in natural man when he *admits his unfitness for doing anything for his own salvation*.

And faith is by no means a mental condition which man must offer before Christ can begin to save. That we are saved by faith does not mean that faith makes us worthy of the grace of God, nor that faith makes us pleasing in the

eyes of God. "Worthy" of "grace"? This is a self-contradiction. No one is and no one can become worthy of grace, for grace is for the unworthy. But grace cannot reach all those that are unworthy. Most people shut it out—with might and main. It reaches only those who admit that they are unworthy and then—in faith—permit Jesus to come with the saving power of His grace.—Here we see grace in a clear Biblical light. Grace is intended for *all unworthy* people. *And it demands nothing from the unworthy except that it may be permitted to come to them.* But it cannot reach a grown person until he—in repentance and faith—has acknowledged his unworthiness and then expects from grace in Christ what he is lacking in himself.

And now Jesus says in Matt. 18:3 that *we grown people by repentance and faith must become as little children.* And then the children and we enter into the Kingdom of God exactly in the same manner: We lie quietly in all our helplessness and do not prevent Jesus from applying the saving effect of His grace upon us. Only by repentance and faith does Jesus get us adults to lie quietly and so permit Him to save us. Children, on the other hand, have as yet no consciousness or will by which they can hinder Jesus from saving them. They only lie still in

their unregenerate condition. They can do nothing. Neither pray, nor believe, nor repent. Nor is this necessary. Christ needs no *help*. He only needs *admittance*. And this He has with the child.

Nor does He need any help from a grown person. Only a chance to apply the power of His grace on sinful man. Therefore the grown person must be made to lie quietly, like an infant, and let Christ—and Him alone—perform the saving act. And this takes place, Jesus says, thru repentance and faith. By repentance the sinner acknowledges and admits that he is unable to love God and to hate evil. By faith he makes up his mind to lie down quietly at the feet of the Savior.

Now he is in the same position as the infant. He can do nothing, neither pray, nor believe, nor be penitent. He can do only what the child can do: lie helpless at the Savior's feet in his unregenerate condition and let himself be saved by Christ—and by Him alone.

If we acknowledge this plain Biblical view of *sin and grace*, of man's total helplessness, and of grace as a free gift absolutely undeserved, then it will also become clear to us *that Baptism according to its nature must be Infant Baptism*. Never does the gratuity of God's grace find such

an expression as when a child is baptized. Here we find grace meeting man even before he can ask or long for it. Grace itself goes in search of people. Because the child belongs to the race for which Jesus has atoned, therefore, immediately after its birth, this child shall be permitted to enjoy the atonement which Jesus has prepared. And as grace does not meet with any opposition in the little child, grace can here do its work quietly and without hindrance. But, in the child as well as in the grown person, thru the *means* which Jesus Himself has prescribed: Baptism and the Word.

Because Infant Baptism corresponds so closely with man's total inability and the gratuity of grace, therefore we also see from history that the denomination which has had the clearest view of justification by faith without deeds, namely, the *Lutheran*, has had few, or rather no difficulties with regard to Infant Baptism. The *Reformed Church*, on the other hand, which is admitted to be stronger in organization and work, but less clear on the question of *nature and grace*, has found Infant Baptism to be a constant source of difficulties.

Does Baptism accomplish the same thing in the child as in the grown person?

Yes, according to what we have seen in the foregoing of the expressions of Jesus, the grown person enters into the Kingdom of God exactly in the same manner as the child. When the act of Baptism is performed upon the child, Christ meets it with the fulness of His grace. In the first place it becomes a partaker of the reconciled relation to God and is thereby *justified*, that is to say, exonerated from the guilt resting upon it because it is a member of a guilt-bound race. And as soon as the sin is forgiven it is adopted as a *child of God* and has its name written in Heaven. And as a *child of God* it receives *the Holy Spirit*, who now *ingrafts it in Christ* as a branch on the vine. And thereby the act of *regeneration* is accomplished.

Just as sin has its quiet but certain effect in the child from the very moment of its birth, so now Christ also by Baptism has begun His work of salvation in the little one. Sin shall not be allowed to work alone. From the very first moment Christ desires to begin His saving counteraction in the child.

This saving effect of Baptism upon the child is *complete* to the extent that it embraces the



whole of this little human being at its present stage of development. The connection with Christ established thru Baptism is active from that very moment and permeates the whole nature of the child as its development proceeds. And it remains active so long as the connection with Christ is unbroken. And it *cannot* be broken until the consciousness of the child begins to awake. Then the connection may be broken in two ways: sometimes by the *child itself*, sometimes by *others*. During the earliest childhood the parents or those who rear the child are responsible for the child's unseen life in God. It is not enough that they have brought the child to Jesus in Baptism. His command was: baptizing them and teaching them. In other words: Baptism *and the Word*.

When the parents or educators neglect to meet the awakening mental life of the child with the *Word about Jesus*, the new-born life in Baptism will die out. As this life begins to develop together with the other consciousness of the child into a conscious personal life it needs *nourishment* thru the Word, otherwise it will languish and gradually die out completely.

## 8

In this connection we must therefore ask this question: Are *all* children to be baptized? No.

Since Jesus commanded us to *baptize and teach* it could not be His intention that we should baptize children that we cannot expect to "*teach to observe all things whatsoever*" Jesus commanded us.

Therefore, in the mission fields we baptize only children of converted heathens and children of heathens who have permitted the mission to teach the Word of God to their children.

Meanwhile there is growing up a very conscious paganism even here at home, in our Christian countries. This is the case among the wealthy as well as among the less prosperous classes. Indeed this question is agitating the minds of many Christians who feel their responsibility: Can we continue to baptize the children of parents who not only personally reject Christianity, but also undermine the faith which the children have received outside of the home, in school, in church or otherwise? To the conscientious pastor the question of refusing Infant Baptism will become as actual and burning as that of denying people the Lord's Supper.

## 9

The Word of Christ must meet the little ones as early in life as we can speak to the child by means of the Word. And the Word must

work in the child as in the grown person: *repentance and faith*.

In children, however, repentance and faith will not manifest themselves in the same way as in grown people. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child; now that I am become a man I have put away childish things," says Paul (1 Cor. 13:11).

The child will never be able to comprehend either sin or grace as profoundly as a grown person does. But from the very beginning the aim of telling and explaining the Word to the child must be to make it realize the nature of sin and point to the open way to Jesus, who forgives if we confess (1 John 1:9).

Repentance and faith in the baptized child shall not, however, serve to *complete the regeneration thru Baptism*, as many have thought. No; repentance and faith shall, in the child as in the grown person, only clear away the impediments that tend to prevent the powers of grace given in Baptism from doing their transforming work in the child.

Thru repentance, or consciousness of sin, the Word is to work mainly two things:

1. The complete break with all *conscious* sins.

2. The humble acknowledgment of one's own lost condition, so that one depends exclusively upon God's forgiving and regenerating grace.

Like everything else in the child, this consciousness will develop gradually, which many parents and educators have not realized. They have tried by artful means to produce in the child a knowledge of self which is not natural to the child. And thus they have forgotten that God Himself established a childhood in which the ripened personal life is prepared. The divine life in the child, too, shall be a beginning and a preparation for the grown person's relation to God.

But we must clearly understand that the child's life in God is a *regenerated life*. In Baptism the child became a child of God, and remains as such until this life dies out. The child, therefore, experiences a complete and real relation to God. Indeed, in the years of childhood this relation is felt with a certainty and intensity which the grown person perhaps may not often experience. This is due to the child's peculiar ability to "receive the Kingdom of God," as Jesus says.

As in a grown person, the divine life of the child finds expression in prayer and in the con-

fession of sins, and in the use of God's Word. In the beginning this life clings closely to the life of the parents in God. The parents pray together with the children. And the children take part in the general devotion in the home. But little by little the child must learn to stand more independently in its relation to God, praying in secret and reading the Word of God all alone.

As to the consciousness of sin, a normal child does not get beyond the first point mentioned: to acknowledge and break with all *conscious* sins. And as to conscious sins, the child will scarcely see and feel guilty of anything but mainly external or tangible ones, as, for instance, to utter untruthful or ugly words, to be disobedient to parents, unkind to other children, and the like. At a later stage, envious and bitter thoughts. At the period of transition, also *impure* thoughts.

So long as the child remains in this childlike life in God and daily confesses to God everything that feels like sin in the conscience, so long the child remains "*standing in its baptismal grace.*" That child, on the other hand, who no longer is impelled to seek God to confess its conscious sin is a *fallen child*, no matter how small it may be. It may continue to pray and observe

the other religious forms, but in this case that does not count.

## 10

The transition of the pious child from the child's life in God to that of the grown person now takes place gradually as the consciousness of sin grows more profound. Sinful words and acts are more and more looked upon as external expressions of the perversity of the mind. And as the child becomes more conscious of the heart, or the disposition of the mind, there will also arise new difficulties in the relation to God. It is not enough to pray to God, read His Word, confess the sins, refrain from wickedness. What God looks at is the *heart*. "My son, give me thy heart!"

Now come those painful questions: Do I love God? Is it not only the fear of punishment that keeps me from doing evil which I see others do? And my heart cleaves to sin. I commit it in thoughts and desires even if it is not expressed in outward acts. Why do I pray to God and read His Word? Is it because I love Him? No, everything is a matter of compulsion!

In this condition the pious child remains in communion with God, tho now it is painful. It cannot forsake its God. But meanwhile it looks upon itself as one who has gone astray

from God, as one who has fallen from grace. And its prayer and desire now is to be admitted again to the grace of God.

Obscurity, confusion, perplexity now characterize the child's spiritual life. If we ask, Have you broken with God? the answer must be negative. Maybe you have sinned against God without praying Him to forgive you? No. Why, then, do you believe that you are getting away from God? Because my heart is dead. I do not love God. I do not hate sin. And my conscience is dull. I am no longer sorry when I offend God.

Now, look here. Now the Word has done its blessed work in this "child's" heart. The Word is to work *awakening* and *repentance*. And now the pious child is awakened. The child now sees and admits its enmity against God, its love for sin and its inability to change itself.

And now comes *the pious child's great choice*.

Will the child humble itself under this humiliating and painful consciousness? If not, one of two things is apt to happen: *either* the child gives up Christianity as something beyond its capacities; *or*, it glides into the quiet but toil-some wage-worker relation towards God. Without peace and without certainty, taking comfort by supposing that the condition of a Christian



can not be anything different. It is said that we shall work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

This is no doubt the experience of many pious children.

But he who submits himself to the humiliating consciousness knows of no other way than to tell God his entire experience. He presents *his complete failure*. And surrenders himself to the One who justifies the *ungodly*. Now he can not base anything on his Baptism, nor on his pious childhood. Now he learns to build exclusively on what was done *for* him thru the death of Christ, not on what has been done *with* him or *in* him.

And now we see that the Word has helped this pious child, simply by repentance and faith, to "become like a child." Now he is *conscious* of exactly the same experience as the one that came to him *unconsciously* at the moment of Baptism. Then he lay there helpless in his absolutely unregenerate condition. And God's grace came in the washing of Baptism with forgiveness and a new life.

Now the child is a fully developed person. Now it knows its unregenerate nature. And now it chooses with complete consciousness to lie down quietly at the Savior's feet. Now it

knows that it cannot help Jesus to save itself, but also knows that Jesus does not need any *help*. He needs only a *chance*.

After this it becomes clear to me that we may properly speak of conversion in the pious child at the time of passing from childhood into manhood or womanhood. It differs from the conversion of *one who has fallen from grace* in this, that the pious child does *not* turn from a life of conscious sin against God. But it has this in common with the conversion of the fallen person that even the pious child must realize its unregenerate nature and its absolutely lost condition. It also has this in common with the conversion of the fallen, that there is a conscious choice. But the exact moment of the decision it is afterwards more difficult to point to in the case of the God-fearing child than in the case of the fallen. It is well known that in one who has fallen from grace this decision indicates a complete turn even in the *outward* life.

The repentance of the God-fearing child, therefore, coincides with that part of the repentance of the fallen which in the Bible is called "*repentance from dead works*" (Heb. 6:1).

## VII

Finally a few words about the mode of Baptism.

Here the first question is: What is it that makes this outward act a Sacrament?

In the first place the act must be performed by the Church of Jesus thru one of its servants, layman or clergyman, who is appointed for this purpose. The congregation is the body of Jesus Christ. And after His ascension He acts only thru this, His body. And it was His disciples He commissioned to perform Baptism.

The saving effect of this act of the congregation depends exclusively upon the fact that the congregation performs the act that Jesus once for all has promised to sustain by His divine power. Where the Church, in meek obedience, complies with the command of Jesus, there it is really the Savior Himself who performs Baptism and gives what He has promised in His Word to the one who is baptized.

In our catechism we read: "Baptism is not simply water, but it is water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word." It is the institution of Christ and the promises of the Word which give to the water or the act its saving power. Therefore Paul calls it washing of water *with the Word* (Eph. 5:26).

We must not, however, take this to mean that the power of Baptism depends upon a repetition, at every baptismal act, of the words used by Jesus when He instituted Baptism. It is not even *necessary* that they be repeated. For we read in the Acts that, at the time of the apostles, Baptism was not performed exclusively in the names of the Trinity, but also in the name of Jesus (Acts 10:48 and 19:5). From this it is evident that the apostles did not look upon the formula of Baptism as a charm.

The main thing is, that the congregation wishes and in some manner makes it known that it now intends to perform the baptismal act which Jesus instituted and promised to endow with His power. As a matter of fact, however, we cannot in a more natural way express our desire to have this act performed than by reminding ourselves and each other of the very words used by Jesus when He instituted Baptism, and of the divine promises attached to Baptism.

## VIII

Now I have said what I wished to say about Baptism on this occasion.

I felt an irresistible desire to show as far as I am able to, that this question of Baptism, as applied either to children or grown persons, is

no more difficult than the other parts of our faith. It has been said: Baptism is so difficult to make perfectly clear that a simple Christian cannot be expected to see it in its proper light. And this has been repeated so long that it is becoming a "dogma." It is this dogma that I wished to do my share in putting an end to.

I have tried to show that the difficulty is not in Baptism itself, but depends on the following:

1. *God's complete counsel* as to Baptism is not taken into consideration.

2. It is assumed—diametrically against Scripture—that children do not need the grace and gift of Baptism.

3. Or it is assumed—diametrically against the plain words of Jesus—that children must become like us grown people before they can enter into the Kingdom of God.

On the contrary, if we go to the teachings of Scripture without these anti-Scriptural views, we find the question of Baptism to be quite plain:

1. The command of Jesus is clear: Make disciples of *all*, *baptizing* and teaching them.

2. This also includes *children*.

3. But do they *need* the gift of Baptism? Yes; Jesus (John 3:6) and Paul (Eph. 2:3) say so.

4. But can they *receive* the gift of Baptism? Yes; better than grown people, Jesus says (Mark 10:15).

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and *forbid them not!* But to let them come to Jesus, to make disciples of them, is done by *baptizing* them and teaching them, He says Himself.

## IX

A profound study of the teachings of the Word of God on Baptism has been a great blessing to me during the past few years. Even God's wonderful act in Baptism gives me a glimpse of His merciful love, which fills my restless and troubled heart with a great and fearless joy.

What a favor on the part of Christ that He has given us not only His promises in His *Word*, but also binds those promises to a visible *act!* As tho He wished to say: "I know what you are made of. I know that your faith needs all the help that I can provide for it. Therefore you shall have not only my *Word*, but also my act as external proof that I have made a covenant of grace with you. Without any merit on your part, before you were able to pray to me for it, while you were yet an unregenerate babe, I met you in the washing of Baptism with my entire love and all the powers of

salvation. From now on you have free access to them. And you can no more change my disposition towards you than you can blot out this fact from your life that you were baptized in the name of the Triune God. My love and the fruit of my redemption follow you. You may turn away from me, you may kill the life that I have brought forth in you, you may break away from the covenant into which I have entered with you; but never shall you live the day when I am changed. 'Tho you be faithless, I remain faithful; for I cannot deny myself."

In this manner it has gradually become a rich and profound edification to me to be present when children are baptized. I find so much to be thankful for, not only when I think of the quiet, wonderful work which God now begins in this little child. But this act at the same time appeals so urgently to me about my own salvation. There are many words in Scripture which never shine so brightly to me as here, at the Baptism of a babe. For instance, the little word *undeserved!* Also: *All this is of God.* Or: "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*"











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